



1907²

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(Reprinted from Physical Training)

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Physical Training as a Factor in Social Ethics

Jakob Bolin, New York

The individual of our day rises to professional eminence and material success chiefly through specialization. The evolution of society forces each of us with wellnigh irresistible power into some narrow field of activity, while excluding us more or less rigorously from participation in, and even knowledge of, the struggles which take place in the broad expanse of human life outside of our own little corner.

Speaking in a general way, the skilled artisan, master of all that pertains to his trade, is no more. He has been succeeded by an automaton, who presses buttons, reverses levers and turns wheels in a monotonous routine. The scientist of yore, embracing the whole field of human knowledge, has, by the extension and intensification of this knowledge, been forced to yield place to a host of specialists, weighing atoms or words, measuring imponderable substances, dealing with figures and fractions which, in their approach to the infinite, far transcend concrete human experience and nearly baffle the imagination. The multifarious and seemingly opposing interests in our body politic all have their special representatives in the halls of legislation, but few are those who may be said to speak for the nation as a whole.

Far be it from me to deprecate this development, which undoubtedly is a necessary condition for the advancement of the race. But in far-going specialization there lurks always the danger of intellectual provincialism. In focussing his attention closely on one single thing the individual may easily lose from his view the many things which belong in the marginal zone, and thus fail to perceive the many bonds of union between that which he is set to do and that which falls in the field

of others. When the mind is constantly confined within a definite horizon it has a natural tendency to become cramped, stunted and unable to grasp or even to recognize such ideas as fill the world outside this horizon. However keen of vision the specialist may be in his own field, he usually perceives objects outside this field only in dim outlines. However unfailing his judgment may be, where each object, thoroughly familiar to him, brings up a multitude of associations, he usually loses his power of ratiocination as soon as he steps outside of his own field, because the objects and phenomena which there obtrude themselves upon him appear detached and disconnected, without relationship to each other. But breadth as well as depth of our intellectual life depends on our ability to readily discern the relationship between apparently isolated facts. It behooves us well, therefore, to see that this fargoing specialization in which we pride ourselves as an effective tool for making material and intellectual progress does not also serve as a weapon by which we are segregated and closed in from the general intellectual advance of humanity. However, that is a subject which does not immediately concern me in this article even though it be one well worthy of serious contemplation.

But recognition of the relationships of men, things and ideas is at the basis not only of a broad and deep intellectuality, but it is also the foundation for social morality, for the conduct of each individual towards his fellow men, or rather the attitude of mind from which this conduct springs. In order to conduct myself properly, and to have the will and desire to do so, it is necessary that I be able to see clearly the relation between myself and others, between my sphere of activity and theirs, between what I am pleased to call my rights and those claimed by others, between the duties imposed upon me by conscience, by custom or by law and those imposed upon others. If, as already stated, a fargoing specialization tends to narrow the field within which we clearly see existing relations, may it not be that it deprives us of the basis for right living as citizens?

I am moved to these reflections when looking about me among my professional brethren, among those who

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have taken up the physical training profession, I find few among them who have any far-reaching interests beyond their specialty. Few whose hearts throb in unison with the great movements of the times. Few to whom the revolution in Russia has any meaning. Few to whom the publication of "The Jungle" was of any account. Few who care how the next election is going to turn beyond their desire to be on the winning side. Few who see anything else in Millet's pictures than pieces of canvas valued at so much per square inch. I see men and women whose minds are revolving around drills and exercises, lessons and exhibitions, visits of the superintendent and rules of the Board of Education, the return of the payday and the possibility of advancement, the victory of yesterday and the contest of to-morrow. I see men and women entering the profession in ever-increasing numbers, who by technical knowledge and skill are far better fitted than those of previous generations to care for the physical needs of youth, men and women who in normal schools have had presented to them, ready-made, the results at which their predecessors arrived by considerable thought, labor and struggle. But in seeing them I also see men and women who, in the hustle and bustle incidental to acquiring their professional knowledge and professional preferment, seem to have focussed their glance so intently on the technical side of the question that they have lost the true perspective, that their specialty so occupies them that they do not see its relations in other civilizing agencies, that they fail to appreciate as they should the extreme complexity of life in the highly civilized community in which they are placed. Studying muscles and nerves, it seems to me that they often forget what, for lack of a better term, may be called the soul. Dealing with men, man becomes unreal to them. The individual stands forth prominently. Society is but a nebulous cloud. To-day is everything. The past and future are empty terms. Ideals awaken little enthusiasm. Records broken and victories won appear eminently desirable achievements in themselves. They are considered of more importance than the preparatory routine work, which should be considered in its relation to the well-being of the nation and the advancement of humanity.

In other words it seems to me that the physical trainer of to-day has become so much of a specialist that he has lost touch with the world, that he is falling from the position he ought to occupy as a living member of society to become a mere cog in the complex social machine. As such a cog he is absolutely unconscious of his duty to society. The gymnasium is his world. His activity is limited by its walls. He attracts pupils there in order to keep them out of the coarser temptations of street and alley. To give them plenty of fun and pleasure. To supply them with activity sufficiently vigorous to set healthy blood pulsating through their vessels. To care for their physical well-being. To secure their symmetrical growth. To teach them the benefits of a systematic use of soap and water, of regularity of living. And that is all.

But that must not be all that there is to our work. That side is simply the routine work, the trade, the bread-and-butter-supplying part. But it is the kind of work which easily becomes drudgery. It is the kind of work for which we should as rapidly as possible substitute mere mechanical contrivances: apparatus, machines, diagrams, tables of figures. Behind this work, however, which tends to the making of first-class animals, there should be the constant endeavor to make first-class human beings, with the emphasis on human beings who rise above the rest of the animal kingdom not only by superior intelligence, but by a feeling of responsibility for self and others.

And it is no new doctrine that I am preaching. It was the doctrine of the ancient Hellenes when their gymnasiarchs strove to form citizens for the well-being of the state. It was the doctrine at the renaissance of physical training in modern times. Ling's object was to develop a man who resembled the old Vikings, not only in physical prowess, but in pristine honor and morality. Old Vater Jahn was consciously laboring to make Germans fit to serve the fatherland and progress. His followers in all times have felt their responsibility. Think of '48! Think of their service to the cause of liberty when they turned Kentucky and Missouri to the side of the Union cause! It was an inspiring sight to me at the exhibition at St. Louis to see the political platform of

the North American Gymnastic Union in a prominent place, showing that even though this organization does not now take a prominent part in the daily struggle against shams and humbugs of all kinds, it can probably still be relied upon in crises like those of the forties and the sixties.

There is another great organization in our land which professedly has great ideals and which takes a prominent part in the physical training of our people. That is the Young Men's Christian Association. Its athletes carry on their sweaters the motto, "Spirit, Mind and Body." Do they realize the meaning of this? Do the physical directors—like members of the militant church, of which they are part—live for the ideals and make their physical work a vehicle for actual practical Christianizing? I do not mean to ask the question whether they attend church and lead prayer-meetings, explain the Scriptures and sing hymns. I think personally that there is too much of that sort of thing, particularly by those who are not fitted for it. But I wonder whether there is any general and conscious endeavor on the part of the physical directors to approach their pupils with sympathy and friendship, and thus unlock the gates to their souls so as to gain an insight into their inner lives, to understand their thoughts and feelings, hopes and aspirations, fears and prejudices; to become acquainted, in brief, with the man before them not merely as so many inches or pounds of flesh and bones, but as a living, thinking, feeling individual. Do they use the gymnastics, the games, the rollicking fun for the purpose of merely making healthy trick animals, or do they see beyond this and strive to rear citizens?

And there is the large body of physical trainers in our public and private schools, colleges and other educational institutions. Are they fully aware that the chief object of the school of our day is to form character? If aware of it, do they share in the work?

Would that I could burn it with red hot iron into the consciences of men and women that the chief work of the physical trainer is the glorious one of forming characters, realizing ideals, creating citizens.

Our conservatism, the tenacity with which we hold on to old ideas—or perhaps it would be more befitting to

use the less flattering words, our intellectual inertia and sluggishness—are perhaps nowhere better exemplified than by the general conception that education shall and must chiefly be gained by parental admonition, study of books and the exhortations of the teacher. That life itself is the great master from which we learn more in every direction than from all other agencies together, we are ready to confess with our mouths, but this really has not got so thoroughly ingrained in our consciousness that we act upon the knowledge automatically and persistently. However, we have got so far in the matter now that all the time-honored educational institutions—the home, the school and the church—have been placed as far as possible in close relationship to life itself.

Take the school as an example of this. For the last century we have constantly been striving to teach more and more by doing. By doing, that is by living the actual life as far as possible in school. The various intellectual disciplines are taught by doing. Laboratory methods are employed not only in chemistry and physics and geology and astronomy and biology and all the other branches of the natural sciences, but the so-called humanities have been brought more and more under the sway of the same methods by the introduction of seminars.

All branches are dominated by laboratory methods with one notable exception. In ethics we still talk, we do not do. We preach at home, we preach at school, we preach at church, and then we add a Sunday-school for more preaching. We have even tried to tack a moral sermon on to every little tale and story intended primarily for the amusement of our children, until within the last few years we could not fail to note the disgust evoked by the traditional hero in the Sunday-school books. But where is the laboratory work in which we should make the pupil translate precepts into activities? Where is the seminar in which the pupil shall by his self-activity work out practical problems under the guidance of experienced leaders. I must confess that I see little trace of it in our scheme of education. It is true that in the middle-class home, blessed with several children and a common-sense mother not overburdened with drudgery, there are opportunities untold for the children to come

in contact with each other and with parents and perhaps with servants under the beneficial guidance of the mother, but this contact is too restricted to be a real preparation to the social life of the citizen. The only place in which our boys and girls come in contact with society, with their fellow-beings, with those whom they are to meet later on in real life at the store and at the office, at the political meetings and in the street car, is the playground. There the little human animal appears among the other beasts of the same kind but from different litters. That is the place where they shall learn to mingle with each other in the manner and mode recognized by society as proper. That is the place where, in a practical way, they shall learn their rights and duties. And that is the place where they do learn them far better than by listening to any sermons of ours. That is the laboratory of social ethics. That is the place where our captains of industry are evolved, where our leaders of men are created, where men are made who advance civilization, and where those originate who prey upon their fellow-men, whether within or without the letter of the law. That is the place where character is formed, where souls are molded. But in this laboratory from which the citizen emerges we let the child run amuck. No guide, no leader but the child's own immature instinct, aided and abetted by the experience of the older ones, which in its turn was developed in the same haphazard way.

We have an excellent laboratory for education in social ethics, but we do not use it. I hold that it is exactly because we use laboratory methods in our intellectual branches but overlook them in the ethical field that we turn out learned scholars, keen business men, able engineers, eminent jurists and the like, and at the same time fail so sadly in making even fairly decent citizens, morally speaking. It is a matter of general knowledge that there is frequently considerable discrepancy between a man's private and public morality. I remember when a man died a few years ago who had accumulated many millions by what was generally considered to be predatory practices, that the one single good thing said in the necrologies was that he had been a kind husband and father. In every other field than in his home life he had utilized his bril-

liant powers to encroach upon the rights of others and at the same time keep out of jail. I suppose that as a boy he had by both precept and practice learned to be considerate to those in the family, but at an early age, thrown upon his own resources to fight his way in the keen competition without any other guidance than the common acceptance of the dollar as a sign of success, he naturally could not look upon his fellowmen in any other light than as being in his way to be pushed aside or used as stepping-stones.

If we do not utilize the laboratory we have for cultivation in social ethics our progress in that direction will be as slow in the future as it has been in the past. And has it not been slow? Hardly anybody relies or can rely upon the mere word of another. Everybody expects to be cheated if he is not particularly looking out for his own interests. If he does not look out for himself and gets defrauded we have an inclination to laugh at him as a simpleton. We say that we believe in the goodness of human nature, but we do not act upon that conviction. Socially considered, we are low, immoral beasts, ready to lie and cheat all around us. And the worst of it is that we do not know it. Let us take a few examples. Everybody claims to be greatly shocked by revelations of secret railroad rebates by prominent magnates, by which a few, because of their lack of scruples, have succeeded in amassing great fortunes dragged out of the business ruins of others. I see the immorality of this procedure as vividly as anybody, and I deplore it. But criminality of the individual can be dealt with even if that individual is among the pillars of society. Criminality, on the other hand, which is born into a whole generation, cannot be readily effaced. And when I see the average citizen, who waxes eloquent in his denunciation of the Standard Oil and the Sugar Trust and the railroads for their criminal rebating, go straight out to the street car and foist upon the conductor a transfer the time for which has expired, or use his ingenuity to defraud the railroad company by letting his twelve-year-old boy ride on a half-fare ticket good for those under ten, then I detect that rebating is a crime not of the few berated for it, but of the many. Then I say to myself this is not a crime

of this or that big trust magnate, but a crime of the nation as a whole, and the cure for it lies not in laws, but in education. I hear a matron denounce in unmeasured terms the filthiness of the slaughter-houses as a menace to public health, and then I see the same woman shake her dirty rugs in such a manner that her filth must enter the apartments of her neighbors. Or is it a man who declares that he is going to vote against "the whole confounded nastiness as perfectly indecent, sir," and to emphasize his declaration he spits his tobacco juice or microbes on the sidewalk to be picked up by the next comer. The trouble is that every one around us assumes a holier-than-thou attitude. We do it perfectly unconscious of the fact that as a rule each of us breaks as many moral laws as the next fellow. And when our attention is called to it we are apt to say, "Well, it is different." Yes it is different. The difference is that in one case it is I, in the other case you.

The moral turpitude of the men against whom the hue and cry has been raised lately is probably no greater than that of the average of my readers. Their acts are in my belief actually committed without consciousness of their anti-social character; they are results of the generally accepted theory that each has to look out for himself. Looked upon from a higher view point, we are all of us more or less moral imbeciles. We have been preached to, but we have never been properly guided in the great laboratory of social ethics, which is the playground. You may teach your boy to repeat, parrot-like, all the moral maxims, not to steal, not to lie and so on all through the list, but if you stop at these abstractions he will not recognize the concrete examples of stealing and lying when he meets them in life, and consequently he will steal and lie without knowing that he is doing so, and the result will be that he hardly ever sees where the demarcation line runs between honesty and dishonesty, especially when his self-interest clashes with the moral maxims. The latter, having no solidity and substance, yield to the onslaught of the former, and the man is perfectly satisfied with keeping the letter of the law while breaking its spirit and hiring lawyers to show him how to do it and still remain officially an honest man.

My contention is, then, that morality cannot be taught by mere precept any more than geography or astronomy. To make it living the child must be confronted with a large number of concrete examples taken directly from life, from his social life; that is, largely from his plays and games, which are to a great extent instinctive or conscious imitation of the pursuits and vocations of adults. In life he competes with some men and combines with others for common interests, he subordinates himself under the leadership of some and himself leads others, his interests frequently clash with those of others, and he demands that others recognize his rights as he is forced to recognize theirs. In all of these respects he experiments on the playground, and that is why I call it the laboratory of social ethics. It is the only place where he can learn in a practical way the difference between right and wrong, and it is at play that his moral conceptions are formed. If this be true (and I am sure that nobody can gainsay it who has seriously considered the matter) it follows of necessity that his development in social ethics will suffer if he has no proper guidance but is left to his mere instincts, modified by the impressions made upon him by the examples of others as immature as himself. I do not expect that my boy of ten shall have the same moral conceptions that I have. It would be unnatural if he had. He is of course only another illustration of the great general biological law of the recapitulation in the individual of the racial development, and consequently I expect him not to have reached as high a level as his father. I expect this from him no more in the field of morals than I do in the field of intellect. The child is by many considered to be absolutely moral, and I suppose this idea is greatly nourished by parental pride. But it is nevertheless a false one. The child is not a moral being. Neither is it immoral. It is merely unmoral. And whether from it shall spring a moral or an immoral adult depends on the kind of guidance it receives in its years of development.

We seem to have got so far in our moral development that the different members of a given family treat each other fairly well. They do not cheat each other. They do not lie to each other. They do not lie awake

nights concocting schemes by which to ruin each other. They consider themselves in duty bound to assist each other in many various ways which cannot be specified, but which make life worth living. I believe this comparatively high ethical development in the family is chiefly due to the fact that the child is not exclusively left to follow its own undeveloped barbarian instincts in its relations to the rest of the family, but is guided by the maturer intellect and parental sympathy of the adults, which have imposed the demand of a fair degree of consideration of others upon the little savage from his earlier days, and thus made such consideration habitual to him.

But as soon as this fairly decent individual steps outside the threshold of the house he feels immediately as if he were in the enemy's country, more or less. He at least does not see the familiar faces. Strangers meet him, and his savage instincts teach him to treat them with suspicion, and he soon finds that his suspicions are more or less well founded. Some members of the community into which he now enters are always ready to take advantage of him if he does not know how to take good care of himself, and, as they are unrestrained by adults, he soon learns that as a stranger he has few rights except those which he can make good by physical strength or intellectual shrewdness. When he has shown these then he has such rights as he can get and maintain, and he learns that in the social life outside his home he must fight for his rights, real or imaginary, and that rights consequently are based ultimately on might. Thus I try to explain to myself the awful discrepancy between public and business corruption and private and personal high-mindedness and sweetness.

The consequence is that I see the remedy in supplying the children with adult leaders in the laboratory of social life, leaders fitted by their own education and inclination to lead in the development of citizens of the highest type. And quite naturally I claim that this rôle shall fall to the physical directors who already are assigned to the leadership in physical activities. But if the physical director is ossified in technicalities and does not realize any higher responsibilities than training efficient

physical and intellectual machines, he will fail sadly in his work.

It would carry me too far to give many examples of the duties which thus should be taken up by the director. It is not necessary. If only common sense be made to rule we are safe. And how I wish that common sense were substituted for many of our written laws and rules. I believe the general tendency of physical directors all over the world is to inculcate respect for law. But I believe a great mistake is made between the letter and the spirit of the law. If we could sweep away with one stroke the majority of our laws of games and leave the conduct of a game to the common-sense judgment of the participants I believe we would have not only more fun, but very much greater moral benefit from our games. Let me give you some examples of this. A game of baseball, as we all know, depends upon the ability of the players to get the ball to certain given places at certain given times. Now, if a player, by a smart trick, succeeds in hiding the ball and, unknown to his opponents, smuggles it over to its place he may win the game. This is not forbidden in the rules, and it occasionally does happen. When it does it is defended on the ground of being conducive to intellectual quickness, alertness and observation. I do not want it forbidden in the rules, but I want the physical director not to emphasize the mere intellectual smartness, and I am sure that by general consent of the players a game so won would be considered a game stolen. In a football game a few years ago one of the players tucked the ball under his sweater for a run. It was a theft, even if the rules did not prohibit it. The man simply invented a new form of an old crime, and would have been immediately ruled out of the game if the respect for the letter of the law had not smothered the respect for that higher spirit, which words can but inadequately express. If a number of competitors from the same institution enter a long-distance run it is a common practice that one who has no real idea of winning the race acts as a pacemaker for another in order to save the latter for the final spurt, while endeavoring to confound the opponents by getting them out of the stride. This in an individual contest is not fair play. It is two

against one. It is bad, immoral, reprehensible, even if not prohibited by the rules. It seems to me to be a direct training to such anti-social acts in later life as, for instance, combinations in restraint of trade. At the recent Olympic games the winner of the Marathon race was a fine young fellow, fine physically, bright intellectually and morally clean, as we understand it. He won his race fairly within the rules. I do not wish to detract from his honor, but I cannot help consider that, judged from a higher moral standpoint than the one generally accepted, there is a serious cloud to his title. He had been at Athens for a month, had run the road almost daily during that time, and he himself ascribed his victory to the fact that he knew every part of the course, every declivity, every hill, every place where he could with advantage let himself out and where he should save himself, while the other competitors were unacquainted with these conditions. You may say: Well, what of it? He had accumulated an extra knowledge and was entitled to the results. Why did not the others do the same? Why did they not look out for themselves? All of which is correct reasoning if the main thing to be considered was the victory to be won. But according to my viewpoint it was not. It was to be a test of skill, endurance and strength under equal conditions for all competitors, and the conditions were not equal.

While I am on the subject of competitive exercises I cannot refrain from calling attention to the evil influence of the athletic spirit. I mean the spirit which demands prizes of any kind, be it in the form of cups, medals or personal aggrandizement in the public press. Are we not by these elements introducing a force which tends to develop citizens who in after life will inquire if such or such a course pays them? We certainly do not thereby train people who are willing to do things for the things themselves.

But I do not principally think of organized games as being factors in the development of a socially ethical race. These games are after all only for the more mature ones. I am more concerned about the actions of the little folks in their more or less unorganized play, where the guidance of the adult is absolutely necessary.

I notice here in the city of New York that the boys living and playing on a certain street resent the intrusion of an outsider. A strange boy may pass through "their" street unmolested, but if he presumes to loiter and play there he is driven off. We have here the conception of proprietary interest because of occupancy. I take it that these boys are on the same level in social ethics as those adults who prate of vested interests or inviolable constitutional and divine rights when the public policy and their private ownership of public necessities clash. I take it that these boys also are the prototypes of the men who in after life are ready by malevolence to deprive the possessors of the vested rights in "their property" and establish a new ownership by the savage rule of "might is right." I take it that these boys need very badly the guidance of elevated adult minds.

On the playground "I had it first" gives a practically incontestable title to occupancy. This is, I think, as it ought to be. But I have noticed now and then a belief that this title is absolute, not only lasting during occupancy, but transferable at will to anybody else. Thus a little girl using a swing at a public playground wanted to transfer it to her best friend in spite of the fact that others were standing in line waiting. Now if such things are permitted do you wonder that we hear of individuals or corporations holding public property—*e. g.*, unused patents—not in order to use them, but to prevent others from using them.

Here are duties for the physical directors far more important than are technical routine duties. Do we all see them? Do we all fulfil them? Do we all work for fair play on the playground, and thus lay the foundation for fair play in our business and professional life? Fair play is synonymous with social morality.

